

# The Man with the Panama Hat

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THE cash division of the United States Treasury Department, where many millions of the Government's wealth are stored, is probably one of the most carefully guarded places in the world. The watchful eyes of trusted officials are upon this treasury during the day, and it is protected by great bolts and bars and a large outside guard of watchmen at night.

A robbery under such conditions seems quite impossible, and yet one of considerable magnitude did occur there on broad daylight and in the presence of numerous officials. General Francis E. Bremer was Treasurer at the time, and was probably more chagrined than appalled on account of this occurrence than because of any of the happenings during his official tenure. It was one of the most daring and successful executed schemes of villainy that came to my knowledge during my service as chief of the Government force. Had the man committing the robbery been possessed of a hypnotic power to close completely the eyes of a dozen or more persons at the same moment, he could scarcely have been more successful in accomplishing his purpose.

A number of men and women sojourning in Washington for a brief period had received through the courtesy of the Speaker of Congress permission to visit the Government Printing Bureau and General Spinner's establishment. At a time when these visitors were ascending the steps of the Treasury Department on the east side, they were met by a distinguished appearing man, fashionably dressed, and wearing a much-misused Panama hat, who received them most cordially. From his manner and appearance the visiting party supposed him to be a treasury official who was there to escort them through the department. Singling out one of the women, he placed his arm and led the way directly to the cash division. As the party passed along the corridor, the man with the big Panama hat bowed to the right and left, and smiled graciously upon every person who chanced to meet.

## Their Distinguished Visitor

THE treasury officials evidently viewed him as one of the distinguished visitors. There seemed to have been a mutual understanding as to the status of this man. Tall and stately, with a countenance that was serene, and a well modulated voice, it would have seemed presumptuous on the part of anyone to have questioned him; so he passed along unchallenged. All paid him marked attention. General Bremer received his guests on this occasion with unusual courtesy, as he had been notified of their intended visit. The man with the Panama hat was present in everything. He was a most charming conversationalist and quite familiar with the affairs of the Government in general, the printing and cash division in particular. The women hovered about him as he explained every exhibit that excited their curiosity. After a time he bowed gracefully to those with whom he was conversing, and, excusing himself for a few moments, stepped out of the room, past several doorkeepers, into the corridor. All were looking for his immediate return.

While commenting on the stranger's accomplishments and good looks, as women sometimes will, the discovery was suddenly made that a twenty thousand-dollar package of ten-dollar treasury notes was missing from its number. Packages of money, as they come from the printing bureau, are placed upon the table according to their denominations and the serial numbers of the bills.

There was now great consternation among the officials and visiting party. The package was gone. There was no chance for a mistake. Each looked at the other with suspicious glances. The treasury officials were puzzled, so were the visitors. Some one inquired, "Where is the man with the big Panama hat?"

The treasury officials looked inquiringly at the visitors, and the visitors looked inquiringly at the treasury officials. A repetition of the question brought out the fact that neither the treasury officials nor the visitors knew the now suspected person. If he was the thief, he certainly had great nerve and wonderful self-command so adroitly and boldly to execute a crime of this kind. The alarm was now given. City officials and detectives on foot and in carriages were on the chase. Every nook and corner of the city was immediately searched; every train and every public conveyance was watched; but to no purpose. The mysterious stranger was nowhere to be found. Had he sunk

into the earth or been dissolved into thin air, his disappearance could not have been less perplexing.

At the time of this occurrence I was at my branch office in New York city. A telegram giving an account of the robbery and description of the thief was received by me a short time after the affair occurred. Efforts were especially directed to the confidence men and sneak thieves in New York city. It was then, as it is now, a good cover for thieves of every description. There a man seeking to lose himself and keep out of sight of the officers of the law might if he was discreet be much safer than at any other point in the United States. The thief, the defaulter, and the divine all touch elbows as they pass along Broadway, neither one knowing nor caring for the destination of the other.

The stolen money could be identified only by its numbers; hence there was little prospect of its recovery. The banks in all the leading cities were notified to keep a sharp eye on ten-dollar treasury notes bearing certain numbers. Government detectives were sent out among the crooks to investigate, but without success until through some underground channel I received information that six hundred dollars bearing the consecutive numbers of the stolen twenty thousand dollars had been deposited in the Stuyvesant bank by one William Merriam, a livery stable keeper on 8th-st.

I arrived at the bank shortly after the deposit was made and found that the deposit slip was still with the money, which had not been distributed. I arrested Merriam and took him before the United States commissioner; but learned upon consulting the United States district attorney that it was doubtful if Merriam could be held, as money was supposed to carry no earmarks. Consequently the case was postponed and the money held as evidence for further examination.

## Owned by a Notorious Burglar

THE livery stable operated by Merriam was known among the detectives as the property of a notorious burglar. Suspicion was now cast in this direction. There was not very much evidence to base the suspicion upon; but suspicion with a detective is easily fanned, and expanded into a balloon of expectancy. Merriam declared the six hundred dollars had been received by him in the regular course of business, but his talk was not altogether satisfactory. The burglar, as men are rated, was prosperous and high in his profession, ranking next in skill to that greatest of all burglars, Max Shilburn. Sneak thieving was entirely out of the line of these great burglars; but yet there might be a connection, and it was upon this supposition that I determined to pay the great burglar a visit. There was at least a chance of discovery.

Leaving two of my assistants round the corner, I rang the door bell of the burglar's imposing residence on West 21st-st. The door was opened a few inches by a young woman. It was held by a chain. In response to my inquiry, she said that Bliss was out of town.

"I shall call again when next I visit the city," I replied in a casual way. It so happened at the time I called that the burglar was standing a short distance across the street, where he had a good view of me, and he knew at once that there was something wrong in the wind. I placed two men to watch the house. The burglar did not return. He

too was suspicious, as I learned afterward. He at once left for Canada.

On the following day I decided to search the burglar's house. I had heard somehow that I kept an iron safe. Taking an expert mechanic and two detectives with me, we broke down the iron gate. The safe was cut open and found to be empty. Nothing could be discovered upon the premises. Matters drifted along for several days without further developments of consequence. I was not much surprised, however, when ex-Judge Sidney Stewart, a prominent criminal lawyer of that day, came to see me and requested a private interview.

"Colonel," said the Judge, "you are pursuing a client of mine; but you cannot hurt a hair of his head. Confidentially I will admit he is one of the biggest guns in his line in this country. But you know he is not a sneak thief, and I know he has nothing to do with that twenty thousand-dollar robbery."

"Then why is he deluding me?"

"Well," said the Judge, "between you and me, privately, he has made his escape from two different penitentiaries, and cannot afford to be arrested and shown up; so he wants to compromise with you. He has a portion of that money in a business transaction and is willing to surrender every cent of it, providing you will pursue him no farther."

The Judge assured me he was a perfectly square man to deal with, and that he would tell me the truth as far as it related to himself, but would not inform others, as it was a point of honor with him. The burglar was to come to New York and have a talk with me. In case we failed to come to terms, it was agreed that he should be allowed to return to Canada unimpeded. Some days later I received a note from Judge Stewart informing me that a carriage would be in waiting opposite a certain number on Bond-st. at ten o'clock that night. "Enter the carriage and ask no questions."

At the appointed time and place I found the carriage in waiting. I entered it and was driven rapidly up Broadway until abreast of Central Park. Here the carriage stopped. The driver opened the door. I then saw that we were close beside a buggy containing two men. One of them asked me if everything was on the square and if the agreement made with Judge Stewart would be carried out. I assured him that it would be.

## A Convivial Criminal

THE man now stepped out of the buggy and took a seat beside me in the carriage. The driver must have been previously instructed, as he drove directly to the Stetson House. The man accompanying me appeared to be a pleasant sort of fellow and bore no resemblance to the typical bad man as shown in the Rogues' Gallery. Arriving at the Stetson House, a room was secured and a bottle of champagne was ordered by the burglar, for such he was.

I now learned for the first time that my companion was no other than G. M. White, alias George Bliss, alias George Miles, one of the greatest bank robbers of his day. White was at this time chief of an organized gang of burglars, one of the most dangerous that ever infested this or any other country. He was known to and under the protection of at least two of the prominent officials of the metropolitan police, as I was reliably informed. Among the many daring and successful feats of this organization was the robbery of the Ocean bank and the Manhattan savings bank in New York city, as well as the Boylston bank in Boston.

The burglar opened the conversation by speaking jokingly of my entry into his dwelling house, and said he supposed I was disappointed on finding his safe empty. He seemed to think the joke was on the detective. And it was. As he warmed up with wine, he talked freely about some of his exploits as a burglar. He had been sentenced to Sing Sing for robbing the Bank of Glens Falls. The Judge gave him ten years for robbing the bank and five years for killing a horse. It seems that he had stolen a horse belonging to the cashier of the bank, and when the horse was ex-



They Considered Him a Distinguished Guest.